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ABSTRACT

An account of personal experiences and experiments with a suggestopedic German course taught at the University of Adelaide in Australia is presented. Summaries of the students' background and of their continuous achievements in the German class are provided. The class was conducted primarily according to the "Manual of Classroom Procedures Based on the Lozanov Method" (Schuster et al. 1976). The students learned on an average about 60 words per night, excluding numbers. No prescribed textbook was used, since the teacher wrote the dialogues and other materials. The topics of the first 12 evenings included greetings, commands, polite expressions and good wishes; introductions; conversations at the bar, in the restaurant, at a date and dance; shopping; at the post office; a weekend; and family. Formal grammar and three songs were taught, and a considerable amount of time was spent on role playing. A 12-week continuation of the course covered new topics including curriculum vitae, search for a flat (apartment), and a trip. Information is provided on students' performance and additional learning activities, along with students' responses to a questionnaire regarding physical relaxation exercises, mind calming methods, music that was helpful in the learning process, and students' educational background and aspirations. (SW)

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THE FIRST SUGGESTOPEDIA GERMAN COURSE IN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

The author of this article gives a detailed account of her experiences and experiments with the first suggestopedic German course taught in Australia. Included are summaries of the students' background, their continuous achievements in the German class and an assessment of their responses to a detailed anonymous questionnaire about the course, all of which prove it to have been a great success.

In February of this year I conducted the first suggestopedic German course in Australia in the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Adelaide. In order to give a fair account of the success of this course, the age, the occupation (which indicates in most cases the educational background) and any knowledge or study of a foreign language of the participating students must be considered.

My class consisted of 20 adults of varying ages and backgrounds: 2 under 20, 8 between 20 and 29, 2 between 30 and 39, 4 between 40 and 49, 1 between 50 and 59 and 3 over 60.

One student, a Chinese who had come to live in Australia only four years ago, withdrew from the course after the fifth evening. To him this method was so foreign, so unusual, he could not cope with it at all.

As far as the students' background was concerned, there were: a retired State Senator and his wife, a teacher (horn) from the Conservatory of Music and his wife, who is a mother, housewife and part-time graduate student, a drama teacher, a secretary to the

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Minister of the State Education Department, a retired public servant, a social worker in a youth rehabilitation center, a primary school teacher, a travel agent, a librarian (Chinese), a lecturer in a teachers college, mother and housewife, a secretary, an unemployed amateur actor and musician, and six students, mostly music students.

One of the music students was an Oriental from Singapore, but has been living in Adelaide since her early childhood. All in all there were ten male and ten female students assembled in a double row, semi-circularly arranged in one of the lounges in the University Staff Club. We were allowed twelve evenings of three hours duration each, three evenings per week for four weeks (throughout the month of February), thirty-six hours in all. The course had to be over on the first Monday of March, when the university's academic term begins. Twenty course papticipants were necessary to make the course financially viable for the university. Fewer students meant considerably higher fees.

At our first meeting I first of all introduced the method and then asked each student to select a German name and assume a different profession from the one they had. That caused great amusement among the students: the Senator wanted to be Willi Brandt and a lawyer, the retired public servant aspired to be Otto von Habsburg and a cabinet maker and the unemployed hippy-looking young man selected Bergmann which means "miner" for his name and nursing for his occupation. Generally speaking the students preferred the professions to the trades. I conducted the classes more or less as outlined in Schuster's et al. *Manual of Classroom Procedures Based on the Lozanov Method, (1976).* For experimental reasons and research purposes I deviated from "the method" occasionally, as will be seen later on. The students learned on an average approximately 60 words per night, excluding the numbers. I did not use any prescribed textbook, I wrote the dialogues, etc. myself. The topics of the first twelve evenings included: greetings, commands, polite expressions and good wishes; introductions; conversations at the bar, in the restaurant, at a date and dance; then shopping; at the post office; a weekend; family. On the tenth evening I taught a short story by Peter Bichsel, "Der Milchmann"

which most students found rather difficult to master compared with the previous conversations. I had the entire seventh evening recorded on video tapes. This event made some students rather uptight and shy and contrasted sharply with their otherwise free and uninhibited behavior in class. I taught quite a lot of formal grammar and three songs. A considerable amount of time was spent on role playing. The first four vocabulary and grammar tests I did not collect for marking, the students checked them themselves. The last three tests I assessed. One elderly woman once scored only 5%, all other students scored between 68% and 99%. Once I gave a vocabulary test in the third hour on vocabulary that the students had learned that same night in the first hour. Three students scored 100%, three 95% and eight between 50% and 70%. Oral performance of all students improved incredibly fast. More than two thirds of the students showed creativity and originality from the third evening on. On the twelfth night - the night of the last class meeting - they had to perform little skits either in a small group or in pairs. It was a hilarious evening. We held class that night on the terrace of our home. The students combined and changed some of the dialogues they had learned, creating the funniest situations. To top it all, one student had decided to produce a parody of me and the method, which again was simply marvellous! After one and a half hours of play acting we sat down to a real Viennese dinner and acted out the scenes in the restaurant. Informal chats with the students revealed that the three over sixty did not think that suggestopedia suited them. In fact they found it hard to relax, they could not sit still during the mind calming, they did not see any need for this part of the course. They found the music during the active and passive presentation of the new material to be distracting, as they tried to concentrate on the German. The remaining sixteen students were so enthusiastic about their progress that they wished to continue the course privately, since the university did not allow us to go on unless the students were prepared to pay almost twice the fee they had been charged for the first part. Ultimately nine students managed to agree on two evenings per week, the other seven had various commit-

ments in their jobs or as regular university students and sadly left the course.

So the second part of the course began in our home after one week's intermission: another twelve evenings were planned. The new topics included: curriculum vitae; search for a flat; a trip; a salesman's visit; in the streetcar; a meeting in the library; another short story by Peter Bichsel, "Das Kartenspiel", which again turned out to be the most difficult part for the students. I dealt with both of these short stories in approximately the same way. I read the story to the students three times:

The first time the students sat there and listened to me, as I read the story and demonstrated as much of it as possible. The students did not have the script in hand. At the end of my reading I asked them in English about the content. About half the class had understood approximately 40% of the story. As the story presumably takes place in a Swiss country inn, I had Alpine folk-music in the background. I then went through the unknown vocabulary with the students, whereby I did not teach words, but expressions, e.g. "in einem verchromten Gefäss" = in a chrome plated container. This vocabulary part I presented with Beethoven's Emperor Concerto. Afterwards I read the story for the second time with the piano concerto continuing. The students did again not look at the text. When I checked on the content of the story this time, all but two students had understood the main outline, three could also give some details. Now the students opened their scripts and followed my reading. Then they practised their reading and talked about the story in small groups. The passive presentation followed, all still before our coffee break. After the break we did grammar and revision work. In the last fifteen minutes of the evening I gave them a test on the new story - ten sentences in German - which the students checked themselves. At the beginning of our next evening I gave them another ten sentences in German to be translated into English. The scores were: 88%, 94%, 50%, 98%, 100% and 98%. Three students were absent that night.

We covered most of the German grammar (excluding the subjunctive, indirect speech and passive voice) and increased our vocabulary by

approximately fifty words per class meeting and added four more songs to our repertoire. I checked the students' progress in six short vocabulary/idiom/comprehension and grammar tests. Only once did a student score below 50%. Typical results were:

Frau Schmidt (from Singapore): 93, 96, 84, 95, 100% (She missed one test; she had four years of high school Geman five years ago.)

Frau Hoffmann: 98, 98, 85, 96, 98, 100% (She did one year of high school German 27 years ago.)

Herr Weiss: 84, 80, 78, 92, 82% (He had never had any formal instruction in German, but he had come across German words in the course of his music studies.)

Herr Schwarz: 62, 63, 58 52, 88, 46% (=adjective endings!) (He had never learned any foreign language at all, showed poor language aptitude, had absolutely no grasp of grammar concepts. He remained the least successful student who had great difficulties during mind calming and little understanding of music. All music sounded the same to him, he said.)

Once I gave the same vocabulary and grammar (conjugation) test twice in one evening, the first time after the active presentation session. Out of seven students who took the test: four students got more than fifteen words correct and all conjugations; one student got fourteen words and the conjugations partially correct; one student got eleven words and the conjugations partially correct and one student scored only seven correct words and had the grammar all wrong. He could not think straight, he said.
After our coffee break I took them through the passive session, followed by a question and answer period and by a song. Shortly before the end of the evening I repeated the previous test. The new scores were as follows: six students got between 15 and 20 words correct and all conjugations; one student doubled his score from 7 to 14 words correct and he even managed the conjugations in parts. After the sixth and seventh meeting respectively we lost one student each, one due to severe illness and one moved interstate. On our last class meeting the remaining seven students performed: two met in a railway station and discussed their lives; three acted

out Bichsel's "Milkman" story, expanding and changing it with wit and imagination, whereby they incorporated parts of various dialogues they had learned throughout the entire course. They used an enormous amount of vocabulary. One student, the most introverted one in the group, did a monologue about herself. Afterwards the students received a written exam consisting of five parts:

1. A dialogue to be written in German (approx. 10 lines) on either "Im Postamt" or "Im Café".
2. A translation from German into English (approx. 320 words).
3. Five English questions to be answered in idiomatic German.
4. A grammar section (fill in the missing words/endings).
5. 15 German questions to be answered in German.

Six of the remaining seven students in the class sat for this test. Scores: 75% (78%); 96% (85%); 69% (70%); 90% (84%); 90% (80%); 44% (60%). The results of the oral performance are given in brackets. It appeared that those students who used a very large amount of vocabulary were less interested in grammatical correctness, as they let themselves get carried away in their conversations, while those who concentrated on grammatical correctness restricted their vocabulary.

As I wanted to test the suitability and possible success of a suggestopedic German course for my regular university work where I am responsible for a highly demanding crash course for beginners, I had to teach grammar as grammar and subsequently demand a degree of grammatical correctness from the students in their oral as well as in their written performance. This created only marginal problems with a minority of students, in fact, especially during the second part of this course the students asked for more grammar. The students realized that grammatical correctness was important not only for good comprehension, but also for their self esteem as serious lan-

guage students, and therefore they did not find it boring or "spoiling the fun" they had with other parts of the course, as one student put it. In the German Department of the University of Adelaide the students are expected to learn the German grammar, subsequently any IA (crash) course which is followed by IIA and then III must include a sound grounding in grammar. This seems to be the area where the pure Lozanov method is least successful, probably due to the fact that the Lozanov schools try to achieve different objectives from the objectives of a university. I gave the students a questionnaire to be filled in and returned two days later when we had our Austrian breakup dinner. An analysis of the answers showed several interesting points:

I. Physical relaxation:

Which exercises relaxed you best?

a) swinging to music,

b) stretching, bending, etc.,

c) tensing muscles,

d) controlled breathing,

e) other.

Most students felt that tensing muscles relaxes them best, followed by controlled breathing. This has also been proven by the Boltzmann Institute for Learning Research in Vienna, where tensing one's muscles preceded every suggestopedic lesson I saw.

II. Mind calming:

Which calmed you best?

a) watching your breathing with music,

b) *Superlearning* cassette (elevators),

c) image of walking along the beach,

d) image of walking up a hill - sunrise,

e) image of beach and ship (to Germany) on the horizon

f) image of being alone on an island

g) thinking of something pleasant (without guidance).

Most students felt that the relaxation taken from Ostrander's book *Superlearning* (1979) has the best effect, followed by the image of

walking along the beach. The image of walking up a hill through the forest and watching the sunrise had an adverse effect. Reason? Several students found it hard to conjure this image as there are no mountains within a 300 mile radius of Adelaide and no forests to walk through! I should have used the bush instead! Bushwalking is something every Australian has done at some time in his/her life!

III. Music:

Which type of music did you find most successful?

1) for mind calming:

a) electronic music (Steve Halpern),

b) guitar music,

c) Smetana's "Moldau",

d) Environmental music.

Halpern's music was rejected by all with varying degrees of vehemence. Instead Indian or Indonesian music should have been used. Environmental music was preferred over the "Moldau" by only one vote. I must add here that one student who is a senior lecturer in the University's Conservatory of Music once gave an explanatory lecture on the "Moldau" upon my request, which was a great success. I watched this piece of music being used at the Boltzmann Institute most successfully. There all pupils and students who participate in the suggestopedic program are given a lecture on the "Moldau" at the beginning of the year. From then on this piece of music is used extensively for mind calming.

2) for the active presentation:

a) Beethoven's piano concertos,

b) Tschaikovsky's piano concertos,

c) "Moldau",

d) Haydn symphonies,

e) violin concertos,

f) mixed music (Brahms, Mozart, Smetana ...)

Piano concertos were favoured over violin concertos and the rest, but two students found all music given to them very successful.

3) for the passive presentation:

a) guitar music,

b) Baroque music (Händel, Bach, Corelli).

Händel and Bach were preferred by all but one, who opted for guitar music.

IV. General questions:

1) Have you ever studied a foreign language before taking this course? If yes, which language and for how long?

Only one student had never studied a foreign language at all. The others had studied one or two of the following languages: French, Latin, German and one student did a year's studies of Ndebele, a language related to the Zulu language. The length of their studies varied from six weeks to eight years and as long ago as two to twenty-seven years.

2) Have you ever studied German before? If yes, how many years ago and for how long?

Three students had never studied German before, the others had studied German from six weeks to four years and between two and twenty-seven years ago.

3) Why did you enrol in this German course?

There the answers were manifold, e.g. preparation for university German studies; revision and improvement of previous German studies; upcoming trip to Germany; forebears were from Germany; enjoyment in languages; wish to be able to read Brecht in the original, etc.

4) What made you decide not to continue with the second half of the course?

The answers included mainly commitments to jobs and studies, one went overseas, three felt that this method did not satisfy their needs.

5) What made you decide to take the second half of the course?

The reasons given for entering the second half of the course were enjoyment and the wish to learn more.

6) Which part of the course did you like best? (Role playing, singing, conversation, reading, grammar, vocab. learning, tests)

Vocab. learning and conversation topped the list, followed by reading and grammar and role playing. One student enjoyed everything equally much.

7) Were you ever bored in any lesson? If yes, what bored you?

They were hardly ever bored; only two of them felt that it became perhaps a little boring, when there was too much repetition in one evening.

8) In your opinion, in which area did you improve most rapidly? (Conversational dialogues, grammar, vocabulary, oral/written comprehension, reading).

Most students felt that they improved rapidly in all areas, in fact it was hard for them to single out any one area. Nevertheless, conversation and vocabulary acquisition were given top rating.

9) Were you worried about your test results?

Two students answered that they were, because they felt that they should have studied at home prior to the tests. But most of the tests were unannounced.

10) Were you ever up-tight or nervous during a lesson due to the course content or due to the way the teacher handled you and/or the rest of the class?

All answers referred to course content and included being occasionally up-tight at test time, or when they were asked to perform and felt unsure of their partner in the dialogue, or when another student asked a rather advanced grammar question.

11) Did you feel exhausted after a three hour class meeting? Give reasons, if you can.

12) Did you feel relaxed after a three hour class meeting? Give reasons, if you can.

13) Did you leave the class feeling good? Give reasons, if you can.

The answers to these three questions were that the three hour class

meetings after a full day's work did not exhaust most of them, in fact they left the class relaxed and feeling good, particularly when the evening had an "active" ending, e.g. when it ended with a song or a game.

14) Did you feel stressed at any time during this course? If yes, say when and why.

The course itself was without stress. Moments of stress occurred, for some students during tests, the time when the evening was taped for video showing, during initial role playing, and when asked to organize the final plays.

15) Did you study (prepare yourself) for the class meetings? If yes, say how many hours per week.

Only three times the students received written homework which they had to hand in for assessment. Apart from that they devoted little time to their German studies at home (from "rarely" to "four hours a week during second half").

16) In your opinion, how could this course be improved?

The main suggestion for the improvement of this course was even more conversation in German, e.g. during coffee break! Another suggestion was to demand synchronized breathing for all vocabulary learning periods, as they found that particularly successful.

I can truthfully say that these students learned as much in less time and without stress and little work outside of the classroom as my regular university students achieve in two trimesters in their crash course, where they have five contact hours, two language lab. hours plus daily homework of approximately two hours, and where the drop-out rate lies by 40%. As far as their oral work is concerned, the suggestopedia students performed far better than the IA (=crash course) students ever will at the end of their first year.

I showed the video tape which we had made on the seventh evening to a selected group of high school teachers and to the German Language Consultant. They were all simply stunned. Reactions included calls for an in-service course for teachers. Their worries: mind calming is hypnosis and therefore forbidden in schools, and

traditionally enforced testing and assessing is contrary to suggestopedic principles.

I would like to end this account of my experience with suggestopedia with some quotations taken from the students' assessment of their first encounter with suggestopedia:

"A very suitable method for classes held at night after people have been studying or working all day. This is, because (the) teacher provides/delivers input in such a way that (the) student can sit back and receive it in a relaxed and receptive state of mind."

"Suggestopedia method (is) very relaxing and positive: I learned much and in a short time, and it was fun."

"I felt relaxed, refreshed and often quite exhilarated. I went home on the first night extremely excited, singing 'Lili Marlen' all the way."

" I think it has been a fantastic learning experience and a real pleasure. I am very grateful for your positive consistant approach and your own enthusiasm. I was greatly encouraged too by the other students' continued interest and commitment."

" Best aspect of lessons for me was the wonderful atmosphere."

" The atmosphere was relaxed but exciting - it was always fun. I felt totally uninhibited."

" I felt freshest after a three hour session!"

What more can one want!

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